

Scared Straight Programs

Scared Straight Programs are programs that allows for adult inmates to have sight and sound contact with juvenile offenders and may include jail tours. These programs generally involve adult inmates describing the extremely brutal, harsh, and unpleasant conditions associated with jail or prison incarceration to delinquent or at-risk youth in a secure setting. The expected outcome of these programs is to modify the behavior of the youth by shocking, scaring, and thus deterring them from engaging in further delinquent activity.

However, studies have demonstrated that Scared Straight Programs are ineffective in preventing delinquent behavior, and there is evidence that participation in Scared Straight Programs may actually contribute toward increased delinquency. Several studies have been conducted which have concluded that youth who were exposed to Scared Straight Programs actually had higher rates of recidivism and were more likely to engage in future delinquent behavior than youth who had not participated in these types of programs.

Not only have Scared Straight Programs been proven to be ineffective in reducing delinquency, but equally important, Scared Straight Programs also violate the sight and sound separation core requirement of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (JJDP) Act of 2002. According to the guidance provided by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), “the state must assure that no juvenile offender shall enter under public authority for any amount of time, into a secure setting or secure section of an adult jail, lockup, or correctional facility as a disposition of an offense or as a means of modifying their behavior (e.g. Shock Incarceration or Scared Straight)”. Further, sight and sound violations of the JJDP Act jeopardize grant funding that is available to Virginia through OJJDP.

For more information concerning Scared Straight Programs, please contact Curtis Stevens, Juvenile Justice Compliance Monitor, at 804-786-0051 or visit http://www.djj.state.fl.us/Research/Scared_Straight_Booklet_Version.pdf.